

Chapter 23

Czech Nationalism Finds a Literary Outlet

(1855)

Bozena Nemcova

Introduction

In Bohemia, the recovery of traditions and the creation of a modern literary language sparked the flames of Czech nationalism. Originally, this effort was led by philologists and historians; later journalists and other writers would popularize the movement. One such writer was Bozena Nemcova (1820-1862), the most popular woman novelist in nineteenth-century Bohemia. In this excerpt from her novel *Granny: Scenes from Country Life* (1855), Nemcova's title character lectures her grandchildren on their duties to their homeland.

Questions to Consider

- What must a good Czech do for his or her homeland?
- What role did language play in the formation of a national identity?

Source

"The Sibyl foretold that great misery would come on the Czech lands, that there would be wars and famine and plague. But the worst of all would be when father wouldn't understand son, or son father, or brother brother, and when neither word nor bond would be worth anything. That would be the worst of all, she said, and then the Czech earth would be scattered under the hooves of horses."

"You remembered it well. But God forbid it should ever come true," said Granny with a sigh.

"Oh, Granny, sometimes I'm so afraid I can't tell you! You wouldn't like the Czech earth to be scattered under the hooves of horses, either, would you?" "Silly girl, or course I wouldn't! Don't we pray every day for the well-being of the Czech earth? Isn't this land our mother? Well, then, if I should see my mother falling into distress, do you think I could be indifferent? What would you do, if somebody was trying to kill your mother?"

"We should scream and cry," said the boys and Adelka.

"Ah, you're children," said Granny with a smile.

"We should have to go to her help, shouldn't we, Granny?" said Babbie, and her eyes were burning.

"That's it, child, that's it, that's the right of it! Screaming and crying don't help," said the old woman, and laid her hand upon her granddaughter's head.

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2 "But, Granny, we're only little, how could we help?" asked John, who was annoyed that he
3 should be dismissed as a mere child.
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5 "Don't you remember what I told you about little David, who killed great Goliath? You see, even
6 a little person can do much, if he has faith in God, you remember that. When you grow up and go
7 out into the world you'll get to know evil and good, you'll be led astray and brought into
8 temptation. Then remember your Granny, and the things she told you when she was out walking
9 with you. You know that I left the good living the Prussian king offered me, and chose to work
10 till I dropped rather than let my children be turned into foreigners and estranged from me. You
11 must love your country like a mother, too, love her above all things, and work for her like good
12 sons and daughters, and then the prophecy that frightens you will never be fulfilled. I shan't see
13 you grow to be men, but I hope you'll remember your Granny's words," she concluded in a
14 trembling voice.
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16 "I'll never, never forget them," whispered Babbie, hiding her face in the old woman's lap.
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Source: Bozena Nemcova, *Granny: Scenes from Country Life*, Edith Pargeter, trans. (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1976), 195-196.